

## International Symposium

# Women in the Balkans / Southeastern Europe Munich, 3 /4 November 2014

**Draft Program as of 22 October 2014**

**Conference Venue:** IBZ München Internationales Begegnungszentrum der Wissenschaft  
(IBZ Munich), Amalienstr. 38, 80333 München

**Conference Team:** **Gabriella Schubert**, Professor, Member of the Board, Southeast Europe Association, Berlin  
**Petra Bläss-Rafajlovski**, Head of Nehemiah Gateway Tirana Office, Albania; Member of the Board, Southeast Europe Association; Berlin  
**Johanna Deimel**, Deputy Director, Southeast Europe Association, Munich

**Conference language:** English

### Background

Almost three decades ago, in September 1985, the Berlin Institute for Balkan Studies organised a conference on "The Position of Women in the Balkans". As the preface shows of the proceedings shows, the core concept of the conference was "patriarchy":

*"... in recent years, it has often been argued that women have lost their original dominant position (i.e., matriarchate – G.S.) to men and, to put it mildly, have been subjugated by them. As Europe's oldest and well-studied culture, Southeastern Europe is the test case of choice to test the validity of this thesis."*

Even at that time, the papers by scholars from a variety of disciplines presented at the conference and published in the proceedings, however, revealed quite different reality, and a rather differentiated picture at that.

Three decades have past and in all likelihood, major developments have added to this complexity. The transition in the former socialist states, military conflicts, Europeanization, migration, social change, financial and economic crises have all had an impact on the position of women in Southeastern Europe.

After the Second World War, socialism gave women access, albeit never unquestioned, to public and economic life through education and jobs. Sometimes women in socialist countries reached prominent positions earlier than they did in Western countries. At an early stage, for instance, socialist countries had female ministers, some of them in positions of real political power (Ana Pauker). In the FRG at best statutory women existed in positions of marginal relevance. Some women reportedly controlled their husbands and wielded significant power through them (Elena Ceaușescu, Mirjana Marković). In subsequent decades, urban women increasingly began to follow Western role models and become consumers of international fashion. Occasionally the post-communist transition

produced women in a new role as entrepreneurs (e.g. Marijana Matthäus). Top-positions for women, however, remained rare (e.g. Jadranka Kosor). Today, many young women opt for higher education or advanced training in order to improve their living conditions and achieve social mobility. To many of them, the combination of education and looks is the key to success.

In the civil wars of former Yugoslavia women were typically victimized. At the same time, they were the ones who championed peace, for instance in the Belgrade group of the "Women in Black." Their activism instigated other women to become an active proponent of peace, combining women's emancipation and the peace movement and countering the machismo of the nationalists with persistent pacifism. Even today, women's organisations such as the "Regional Women's Lobby for Peace and Justice in Southeast Europe" for justice and reconciliation brings together the former adversaries from the wars. The Ukrainian group "Femen" has become a precedent throughout the region.

Although there has never been a Balkan equivalent to the Western women's emancipation movement, many women have been forced to a more active stance by the private necessities of economic survival and parenting. Largely unnoticed by men who tend to persist in old stereotypes in the Balkans, some of the real heroes of the Balkans today are women. More often than not, in the economic dire straits since 1990 women were the ones who left their homes in order to earn money in the West for their families, typically in low-pay menial jobs. The wife provides the money, the husband tends the children – traditional role models turned upside down.

Having said that, public sexism still is an everyday experience for women in Southeastern Europe in their workplace, in commercials and in politics. In the media of the Balkan countries, "women are blatantly reduced to their body and looks," as Sanja Sarnavka argues. She heads the organisation B.a.B.e. (an acronym for "Be Active, Be Emancipated"), founded almost twenty years ago and one of the main groups in Croatia fighting for women's rights. "Women are being sexualised," the Zagreb-base and EU-funded women's group "Izvor" admonishes. Both groups are actively informing women about their rights, offering legal assistance and a telephone hotline for victims of domestic violence and funding research concerning the discrimination of women.

Famous female pop singers in the region aspire to the role of sex symbol and are the figureheads of the widespread turbo-folk and Čalga culture of the region: suggestive dresses, dolled-up singers and folk music with accordions. The media play their part in this scene. In Bulgaria, for instance, an explicitly sexist TV commercial of was changed after negative comments and a storm of protests.

Women fighting for gender equality often face unexpected resistance on the part of other women. "Too many women despise feminism and think that a "real" woman should not question the traditional values," says Sarnavka, the head of B.a.B.e. Below the surface of modernity, traditional values and gender patterns persists. Surveys demonstrate that due to their self-image many women choose this role of their own accord, the role suggested as the ideal position by the nationalist parties.

The burgeoning growth of prostitution and trafficking in women in the former socialist countries of Southeastern Europe marks yet another side of the image of women. The transition to capitalism and consumer society brought a massive expansion of prostitution and the sex industry, which have become sizable economic factors. Thousands of women and girls ended up in the hands of human traffickers and panderers, forced by poverty desperation and lack of education. CARE supports local organisations fighting human trafficking and also advocates equal opportunities in education and jobs for women and ethnic minorities in Bosnia, Serbia, Kosovo and Croatia.

These are but a selection of the numerous aspects of the present position of women in Southeastern Europe. Their implications will be discussed at the proposed conference in much more detail from the perspective of academic disciplines such as sociology, ethnology, history, literary studies, linguistics (the language of women), law, medical science and economics.

## PROGRAM

### Monday, 3 November 2014

17:00 hrs **OPENING AND WELCOME ADDRESSES**

Johanna Deimel, Petra Bläss-Rafajlovski, Gabriella Schubert

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Gabriella **Schubert**, Member of the Board Southeast Europe Association

**KEY NOTE: Marije Cornelissen**, former MEP, Rapporteur on women's rights in Balkan accession countries, Amsterdam

***Women's Rights in the Balkan / Southeast European Countries: Achievements, Challenges, Perspective***

19:00 hrs *End of the first Conference Day*

### Tuesday, 4 November 2014

09:30 hrs **PANEL I: PARENTHOOD / ECONOMY / SOCIAL WELFARE**

- + women and parenthood
- + current and future challenges for economic independence
- + gender dimension of social reforms
- + gender division of labor market
- + women's entrepreneurship

#### Short contributions by:

Mary Ann **Rukavina Cipetić**, Director of GTF-Initiative for Sustainable Growth, Zagreb  
Vera **Gudac-Dodić**, Senior Research Associate, The Institute for Recent History of Serbia, Belgrade

Krassimira **Daskalova**, Professor of Modern European Cultural History, Faculty of Philosophy and Social Sciences, University St. Kliment Ohridski, Sofia

**Moderation:** Petra **Bläss-Rafajlovski**, former Vice-President of the German Bundestag, Member of the Board, Southeast Europe Association; Berlin

11:00 hrs *Coffee Break*

11:30 hrs **PANEL II: WORK-LIFE BALANCE / MIGRATION**

- + managing requirements - between tradition and modernity
- + mobility from a gender perspective
- + challenges of demographic development

#### Short contributions by:

Marijana **Dinek**, Executive Director, Bosnia and Herzegovina Women's Initiative Foundation, Sarajevo

Marina **Hughson**, Senior Researcher/Scientific Counselor, Institute for Criminological and Sociological Research, Belgrade

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Edlira **Narazani**, Project Coordinator, The Impact of Migration on Women Empowerment in Western Balkan Countries, (RPP); The Albanian Centre for Socio-Economic Research (tbc)

**Moderation:** Johanna **Deimel**, Deputy Director, Southeast Europe Association, Munich

13:00 hrs *Lunch Break*

**14:30 hrs** **PANEL III: SEXISM / VIOLENCE / HUMAN TRAFFICKING**

+ new and old outgrowth of gender stereotypes

+ role of (new) media

+ domestic and social sanctioned violence

+ new dimension of trafficking in human beings

Short contributions by:

Sanja **Sarnavka**, President, B.a.B.e – Be active, Be emancipated and Human Rights House, Zagreb

Ana **Luleva**, Professor, Director of the Ethnographic Institute at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Sofia

Inge **Bell**, Publicist & Human Rights Activist, Leipzig

Maja **Raicevic**, Executive Director, Women's Rights Center, Podgorica

**Moderation:** Gabriella **Schubert**, Member of the Board Southeast Europe Association

16:15 hrs *Coffee Break*

**16:45 hrs** **PANEL IV: ACTIVITY FOR RECONCILIATION / POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND REPRESENTATION / LOBBYING AND REGIONAL COOPERATION**

+ women in political parties and in parliament

+ new forms of lobbying and protests

+ lessons learned from regional networks

Short contributions by:

Zorica **Trifunović**, Activist & Consultant at Women in Black, Belgrade

Valentina **Leskaj**, MP, Head of the Albanian Delegation in PACE, Tirana

Teuta **Sahatqija**, MP, President of Women Cross Party Caucus, Vice-President of LDK, Prishtina

Lejla **Turčilo**, Professor, Vice-Dean, Faculty of Political Sciences, University of Sarajevo

**Moderation:** Marije **Cornelissen**, former MEP, Rapporteur on women's rights in Balkan accession countries, Amsterdam

**18:30 – CONCLUDING REMARKS**

Petra Bläss-Rafajlovski, Gabriella Schubert, Johanna Deimel

**END OF THE CONFERENCE**